

MULTI: The Chemistry of Church Diversity

A Study Guide

This study guide is a resource intended to help you utilize the book *Multi* in a variety of ways. There are four suggested agendas (A, B, C and D) for processing the book with friends.

Plan A assumes that all participants in the study group read the entire book together, and process the contents sequentially. This could be any kind of group: a group of church leaders interested in learning and thinking together about their church's multi challenges, a group of friends forming a launch team for a new church, clergy peers in a professional study group, a church school class, a general book study group or a church staff team. I recommend that you slow down and extend the study by a week or two anytime that you feel that you need more time to process the ideas. Rushing off to the next chapter is unnecessary. Some chapters may be easily processed in one hour, and others may take several hours for your group. Flexibility will make for a better conversation and for better learning. It could be that your group will choose to work through the entire book, but to do a retreat focused on the Practices in Chapter 2, and then proceed to process the remainder of the book in regular gatherings.

Plans B and C are both ideal for building retreat format.

Plan B is for church teams or new church launch teams that wish to focus on building team capacity for a multi ministry. It is important with Plan B, that key aspects of the diversity desired is represented by participants in the room for the retreat. It is helpful for all participants to read the entire book. But the group work might focus on Chapters 1, 2 and 6. Focus on what seems most helpful. You may not be able to fit every activity suggested into your retreat.

Plan C is for a church team that wishes to discern what type of multi-church it aspires to become – possibly without all the diversity in the room that would be necessary to pursue Plan B. It is helpful for all participants to read the entire book. But the group work might focus on Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7. Chapters 3-4-5 will unpack eight kinds of multi-valence that are transforming churches in our time. You may choose, in advance, to focus on only three or four of these multivalent capacities in your group time.

Plan D could be pursued either in retreat format or as ongoing group study. It is for churches that are intent upon moving from a single site to a multi-site ministry

strategy. It is helpful for all participants to read the entire book. Group work might focus upon Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6.

With each group, the Study Guide's suggestions may not all be workable, due to time limitations or other considerations – these suggestions may cause you to think of exercises that will work better for your group. This is your tool. You are in charge of how you choose to use it.

READINESS 360 CAN HELP YOU IDENTIFY BEST NEXT STEPS FOR YOUR CHURCH

In all cases, I strongly encourage you to integrate this book study with a reality test: take your congregation through the *Readiness 360* survey. This will help you know how quickly your church can move forward to increase and broaden its multi-valence. **Every church has a speed limit** – and it's good to know this before making plans for significant change or expansion. The cost of *Readiness 360* is very small versus the cost of an onsite consultant. For most churches, it is less than \$200. For very large congregations, it is still no more than \$700. It will take you about an hour to set up the online survey: to customize it for your congregation. Then you will want to take two and one half weeks with open surveys, sending the links to your congregants three times. The typical time reported for completing the survey is about half an hour.

The questions are randomly presented to each participant, looking at their experiences and/or perspective related to spiritual practice, relationships, alignment and cultural openness. In addition, the church will get to ask two open-ended questions of its choosing.

At the end of the two and one half weeks, the hope is that more than 20 percent of your average worship attendance (or a minimum of 20 people for smaller churches) will have taken the survey. If some of your people lack the equipment or the online ease to take the survey from home, you can set up a couple computers at the church where a host can help them take the survey. When you close the survey for the church, an extensive report is generated in less than a minute. More than 1000 churches have taken the survey, making it possible to norm the results accurately for North American congregations. Once you get your report, *Readiness 360* will equip you with a key to interpret your survey results, as well as ministry tips toward improving your church's readiness for God's next big thing.

The numerical quotients from the four areas of measurement in *Readiness 360* can be added together to form a general readiness quotient for your church. Here is what we know about that quotient:

320 and above	Extremely high readiness: Almost anything you try – if you have prayed about it first and feel God's call to do it – you will
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	have fun on the journey! Your church leaders will benefit from reading <i>Weird Church: Welcome to the 21st Century</i> .
308-319	High readiness – don’t sell yourselves short! Despite certain challenges that may stand between your church and its vision – there is good likelihood that your church will discover a way to prevail! Your church leaders will benefit from reading <i>Weird Church: Welcome to the 21st Century</i> .
298-307	High end of normal – Your church may or may not be growing, but there are multiple healthy habits and vital signs. By paying attention to the Leader Tips in your report, you have a good chance of making significant ministry advancement.
288-297	Low end of normal – Your church is probably steadily aging, like most North American congregations. Because of this, there is a day coming soon (maybe already here) when volunteers are going to age out and donations are going to begin to dry up. It is time to take action to create a new ministry narrative for your church, while still you can.
276-287	Low readiness – be careful! There is a good chance of significant conflict or distrust within your church running along certain relational lines. If you vote to climb a big mountain too quickly, you will pay for it with conflict and unrest in the congregation. See Paul Nixon’s 2006 book, <i>I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church</i> .
275 and below	Extremely low readiness for change: Pay close attention to chapter 2 in <i>Multi</i> . There is a good way forward for your congregation. But small steps are in order to begin! See Paul Nixon’s 2006 book, <i>I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church</i> . No matter where your church is in terms of readiness, there is always a constructive next step!

CHAPTER 1

MULTIVALENCE

Activity 1

Playing with the Metaphor

- Read the paragraph definition of multi-valence from page – (“Multi-valence is...”) along with the paragraph a few pages later (“A multivalent church...”).
- Ask: Does our church have customized points of connections for different kinds of people?
- Have you ever known a church that functioned as a *closed shell*? Describe that church.

- Have you ever known a church that sought to juggle a very high valence, but constantly wandered into conflict and stress? Describe that church.
- Ask the group to answer Paul Nixon's ten church consultation questions on pages 8-10, with respect to your (or their) congregation(s).

Activity 2 Clarifying our Motivation

- Hand out paper and ask each person to write his/her answer to the question: "Why does this feel important and/or urgent to us with respect to our church?" Collect the answers. Read each answer aloud. Then discuss freely.
- What up until now seems to be driving your church's expanding multi-valence? (Or) What up until now seems to be holding our church back from expanding its multi-valence?

Activity 3 Taking the Multi-valence Quiz and Processing (Very important activity that will be referenced in future activities)

- The quiz is located at the end of chapter 1. Let each person complete the quiz and self-score.
- Do you think your church's internal diversity is stable, increasing or decreasing? Why?
- Should you be spending more energy to expand your valence or to improve your effectiveness with your current juggling act? Are you doing okay with the varied populations you are presently seeking to serve?
- What do you see as the common ground that makes multi-valence possible at your church?

Activity 4 Understanding Your Church's *Readiness 360* Quotient and what it can teach about your capacity for multivalent ministry. (In an earlier session, leaders can process the specifics of the report – in this session however, you are to focus only on the total of the four quotients. Pass out an information sheet with the Readiness 360 information above, and give the group only the composite quotient – the sum of the quotients for the four Readiness areas. Invite folks to process their experience of the congregation in light of this single number.

You may choose to work with the Intercultural Development Inventory instead. This will require a significant number of church leaders and participants to fill out the survey. IDI is an amazing tool. Paul and Sam at Epicenter Group are trained in this instrument and would be happy to explore with your

church whether it might be an alternative to Readiness 360 for your church. The IDI is not a church-specific instrument. It focuses only on intercultural skills. If you are interested a free half hour consultation with Paul Nixon or Sam Rodriguez to think through the best evaluative instrument for your church, you can reach out via epicentergroup.dc@gmail.com.

CHAPTER 2 THE PRACTICES

Activity 1 Adventures in Contemplative Prayer

Prayer Practice 1 – Breath prayer

First movement: Name a matter of worry or concern, breathe in to hold the concern together, and breathe out as you collectively give it to God. Repeat, with group members taking turns naming one concern at a time.

Second movement: Name a matter of joy or blessing, breathe in to hold the blessing within our hearts, and breathe out in thanks to God.

Prayer Practice 2 – Holy imaging

Allow an image to settle in our minds – it can be a person – any person – a place that is important to us – any scene – but we have to be able to picture it. In this prayerful contemplation, we let go any thoughts or judgment about the person or scene in our mind. We just watch quietly. And then after two minutes watching, we smile and channel God’s blessing into the picture – we just imagine blessing. Afterwards, some people may want to share who or what came to mind, and what it felt like to watch with love and to extend blessing into the scene.

In second and third experiences of holy imaging, the leader can direct the participants a bit – to images at work, at school, at home, in nature, etc. If the group takes a prayer walk first¹, then you can ask them to focus their mind’s eye on one thing or one person they saw, and look again deeply and lovingly.

Activity 2 Adventures in Deep Listening – two 90-minute sessions

Session 1 – Lectio Divina on life stories – 15 minutes per person – the facilitator uses their phone to time each section. Use an object such as a smooth stone or talking stick as a

¹ See www.epicentergroup.org/resources for a downloadable PDF on how to lead a simple prayer walk.

means to invite folks into sharing. It is important to hold the space even when there is silence. Each 15-minute round goes as follows:

- One person gets to share for 7 minutes – any story from their life that they think gives a snapshot or insight into who they are, where they come from, etc. Encourage them to avoid telling stories where they are the heroes.
- One minute pause
- Group shares for 4 minutes in reflection upon the story.
- Pause
- Person who shared then responds for 1 minute.

Session 2 – Lectio Divina on life stories – 15 minutes per person as before. Except this time ask them to tell a story about a moment of personal shift, discovery or rebirth.

- Activity 3 Clarifying the Core Values and Vision (you will need between 90 minutes and three hours, depending on how deeply you wish to pursue this conversation.)
- Start by re-reading aloud the answers or consensus that emerged from the discussion of Chapter 1 around the subject of *the common ground that makes multi-valence possible* at your church (from Chapter 1, Activity 3).
 - Values are behaviors or ways of living that apply, regardless of the group's intended destination or objective. For example, on a cross-country road trip, a family might set the following values: (1) drive no more than five miles per hour above the speed limit, (2) stop every two hours to stretch and take restroom breaks, (3) drive the side roads for a part of each day, versus the interstate, (4) eat at local cafes as opposed to chain restaurants, etc. Such values could be applied regardless of the destination. With this in mind, ask each person to write down two or three values that they see to be lived within the life of your church. Then, allow each person to share one value at a time, so that you may go around the room two or three times for them to share fully. While this may not produce a ready set of core values to post on the church website, it will begin to describe the character of the church.
 - Next, invite each person to write a short paragraph describing a snapshot of life at your church in five years if everything went really well between now and then. What would the church look like? People can describe whatever interests them. But instruct them to hold it to a medium paragraph. Pass the paragraphs around and allow people

to underline or circle words or phrases they feel are important. After everyone has had a chance to see each paragraph, appoint two persons to process the paragraphs into a brief vision paragraph.²

CHAPTERS 3, 4 and 5 THE CAPACITIES

- Activity 1 Overview of the Eight Capacities Discussed in *Multi*.
- Break the group into teams of two to digest one capacity into a very short summary. If you have eight in the group, you could choose four capacities for this exercise. Or you could do two rounds in order to cover all eight. The teams present to the rest of the group, and everyone responds to the short presentation with a question, a statement or an ah-ha – which can promote discussion.
- Activity 2 Discerning your church's strengths and its next frontier
- Begin with someone reviewing the group's consensus from Chapter 1, Activity 3.
 - Continue with the question, posed to the group: Name something that your church is really good at. How might this asset be valuable in terms of expanding your church's reach and inclusion of new kinds of people?
 - Allow different people to share: Is there a group of people not currently well included in the congregation's life that you would like to see better included? Who are they? How much change would you be willing to accept in order to include and meaningfully serve this population? Note any consensus that emerges in the conversation.

Please note that in order to begin a ministry initiative to and with a new population, community conversations with the population of interest are essential, prior to major ministry design and planning. Also, it may be necessary to

² If you wish to spend more time on this exercise, I recommend Will Mancini's Vision Frame exercise, where the group works to articulate four components before proceeding to talk vision. These are (1) the church's mission or purpose, (2) its values, (3) the strategies chosen and (4) metrics – how you measure progress. A fuller explanation of the Vision Frame can be found online at www.willmancini.com. You can download a pdf entitled *The Church Unique Visual Summary*. The idea is that once you have articulated these four elements, you can use each as one side of a picture frame, and when you look through the frame, whatever you see together – that is your church's vision. Consultants at The Epicenter Group are able to lead your church through a Vision Frame process.

bring a staff member on board who is part of this population, or who has extensive experience with this population. At Epicenter Group, we are happy to help your church organize yourselves for community conversations in order to make ministry plans to reach new people.
www.epicentergroup.org

Activity 3

Naming your church's Host Culture

- Re-read the section in Chapter 4 on Host Culture and Hospitality. Discuss each of the five points.
- Can the group articulate what might be the Host Culture of their church? We are looking for dominant cultural aspects of the majority, which are not requisite for full participation and inclusion in the church, but which might yet color the style and approach to ministry that the church pursues for years to come.
- Might there be a team of three persons who would think further on this topic and perhaps offer recommendations back to the church's larger leadership team?

Activity 4

Multi-site Deep Dive (for Study Plan D)

- It is important that any sort of multi-site endeavor be well rooted in the church leader team's vision. Discuss: Where did the idea emerge to move to a multi-site ministry – within our team or from the outside? Does the idea make sense given our church's current health and vision?
- Is an empty church building – or one that has recently come available – driving the conversation about multi-site? If so, it is important to make sure that we are not imposing a ministry opportunity on our church that is inappropriate to the church's current culture or vision. It is okay to say *no* to such an opportunity, or *not yet*.
- Is a denominational grant driving the conversation about multi-site? While it is encouraging to see the denomination willing to invest in our church's ministry expansion – unless the local congregation would be willing to raise all the money itself, the vision may be more about the denomination's vision than the congregation's. Beware!
- Is there an existing, alternative worship service at our church that is struggling – whose leaders believe that they would grow if only they were able to meet in a new location? Sometimes relocating a worship community enables growth – more often it does not!

- The higher a church's Readiness quotient (from the *Readiness 360* inventory) the more likely that the church is ready for a multi-site endeavor. The lower the Readiness quotient, the more likely that the church needs to strengthen certain capacities and find success at some smaller-scale initiatives for reaching new people before pursuing a multi-site project. Revisit your Readiness report. What does it suggest for your preparation agenda to get ready to launch a second campus?
- The multiplying church should be prepared to provide worship and age-level ministry leadership so that the new campus begins with as many worship participants as possible. 25 -30 persons will not be enough to pull this off in most cases! How many people can we afford to release from participation at the current campus to be a part of the launch team at the new campus? The more that we release, the better for the new campus. But we must remember that life goes on at the mother campus – we don't want all the creativity and music talent going across town. For this reason, it may be that we need to grow the launch team as a mix of veterans from the mother campus with new persons from the new neighborhood(s).
- What do we know about the part of town where we wish to start a new campus? How are the people there different than the people the church currently reaches? The more demographic differences that exist, the more critical it will be to build a launch team includes some of the neighbors we are seeking to reach and serve. Church planting protocols and strategies will be required.
- Have you identified your campus pastor? The fewer people we give her/him from the mother campus, the more that the campus pastor will need to have church planting gifts and training. In all cases, however, the campus pastor needs to have time as a part of the pastoral staff at the mother campus: at least a couple years! Six or more years, perhaps with strong accomplishments in youth ministry, often bode well for how the pastor will transition into a campus pastor role. If no such leader is immediately apparent, you may wish to slow this multi-site journey down by two or three years, and develop your campus pastor first!

Paul Nixon, the author of *Multi*, serves as Director of Church Multiplication for United Methodist Discipleship Ministries. In this capacity has designed and now oversees a program called *Churches Planting Churches*. This is an

eight-month journey learning about multi-site ministry. It includes a four-day learning summit, exposure to mentor churches, collaboration with other churches on a similar journey and work with a coach. The goal is to assist congregations that wish to expand to a new location in sound ministry planning at a cost significantly lower than hiring a coach/consultant directly. Several *Churches Planting Churches* Summits are planned in 2019 and 2020, at locations all across the United States. Churches of any denomination are welcome to apply and to participate! For more information, you may contact Paul Nixon directly: paul@epicentergroup.org.

CHAPTER 6

THE LEADER TEAM

- Activity 1 Taking the Quick Check “How’s our Team Doing?” and Processing together
- The Quick Check is at the end of Chapter 6. Allow each person to work through the questions – either before the meeting or in the room together, but working independently.
 - When sharing answers with the group, go around the circle and allow each person to share. Up to two people can ask questions to clarify what they mean – but no one can debate or disagree with anyone at this point.
 - After each person has shared, then the conversation can open up for free sharing and feedback. It is not necessary that the team see everything the same way. It is more important that we simply take note of where there is consensus and where our perspectives diverge. For now, live with the divergence of thinking – this is an important part of how we show respect to one another in a team.
- Activity 2 Glass half full/Glass half empty – breaking into two teams to look at the team’s strengths and challenges.
- Have each team member rate himself/herself on a scale of 1-5 as to whether by temperament they tend to be a glass half full or a glass half empty person. Invite the more naturally pessimistic team members to assess the team’s strengths. Invite the more naturally rose-colored glasses folks to assess the team’s challenges. Then each group presents their thoughts to the other half – with discussion.
- Activity 3 Develop a 90-day Action Plan for Strengthening the Team that includes the following

- Creating a simple covenant of core practices and protocols for your life together as a team. Live into these gently and consistently. If you worship or study Scripture together, pass around different roles among the group from one week to the next. Have fun. Encourage each team member to be herself/himself and to be as creative as they wish in offering leadership to the group – don't get into a rut too quickly!
- Revisiting the covenant and tweaking it at the one-month marker. Make sure it fits your team's personality, culture and theology. Be sure to listen to newcomers on the team, younger members of the team and persons who represent populations that represent the expanding valence that you desire for your church.
- Going on a retreat together, or going on a short mission trip together, doing a ropes course, simply sailing a boat from point A to point B, or going backpacking together a few days – learn each other, talk through the dis-connects, push through the moments of hurt feelings. Teaming requires time together. You may wish to brainstorm together as a team before committing to a major team-building experience.

CHAPTER 7

THE POSSIBILITIES

- Activity 1 Processing the Chapter in terms of what feels Hopeful
- Each person in the group picks one section of the chapter that they find especially encouraging and hopeful. Share briefly why this idea is encouraging to them.
 - Please note that if several persons converge around particular sections, that a further conversation may be warranted between those persons. Together, they may discover and articulate an important idea that impacts the church's vision.
- Activity 2 Reflecting upon the Big Idea(s) from *Multi* that hang with you – and why these ideas feel important to you
- Each person in the group articulates the most important idea that lingers in their minds in the wake of reading *Multi* and in these conversations with peers – the big idea for some persons may be something not mentioned in the book at all, but that arose in the processing with the group.
 - Record these big ideas – and distribute a page to the team for folks to think about for a week, and then re-convene to ask if any action steps or additions to the church's ministry plans need to be planned, in light of these ah-has.

Activity 3 How do the Leader Tips on your church's *Readiness 360* report fit in with what you have learned in reading *Multi*?

- Most churches are given ten Leader Tips. Churches with higher Readiness quotients may receive fewer Tips. Pay special attention to the first four or five tips.
- Leader Tips are computer-generated. They are NOT recommendations to your church, just tips to be considered, based upon the patterns that emerged in people's survey responses.